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SUBJECT: SLOVAKS RAISE OPTION OF DENYING ENTRY TO HUNGARIAN PRESIDENT
SOLYOM

CLASSIFIED BY: Keith A. Eddins, CDA.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On August 21, FM Miroslav Lajcak convoked an urgent meeting with the Chiefs of Mission of Bratislava's diplomatic corps to explain Slovakia's opposition to the planned visit of Hungarian President Laszlo Solyom this afternoon at 6 pm (Bratislava time.) Solyom plans to attend an unveiling of a statue of King Stephen I in Komarno, a city situated on the Slovak-Hungarian border. GOS officials were not invited to the event, nor were they officially notified of Solyom's visit. The GOS has tried at many levels to convince Solyom to postpone the visit, and continues to consider its response if Solyom tries to enter Slovakia. One option is to deny him entry. End Summary.

¶2. (C) At the impromptu briefing FM Lajcak hosted on August 21, Lajcak reiterated the key points of a August 19 letter signed by President Gasparovic, PM Fico, and Speaker of Parliament Paska. The letter stated that President Solyom's visit would be inappropriate and he was unwelcome. Lajcak explained that Slovakia has no problem with honoring St. Stephen, and would welcome an appropriately-organized bilateral visit from Solyom. However, due to the current tense atmosphere between the two states, the absence of effective diplomatic communication about the visit, and the fact that today marks the forty-first anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (which included Hungarian forces occupying Komarno), Solyom's visit represents a deliberate provocation rather than an opportunity to move forward in the bilateral relationship.

¶3. (C) Lajcak said that he and President Gasparovic both met with the Hungarian Ambassador to Slovakia to press for a postponement of the visit. Lajcak also said that he spoke with Hungarian FM Balazs, and that PM Fico spoke with his counterpart PM Bajnai. Lajcak stated that several EU countries have also asked Solyom to postpone his trip. Lajcak said that so far their entreaties appeared to have fallen on deaf ears, and that immediately following the meeting with the diplomatic corps he would be meeting with PM Fico and President Gasparovic to discuss their options if Solyom tries to enter Slovak territory.

¶4. (C) Lajcak suggested that one option would be for Slovakia to invoke a 2004 European Parliament Directive ("Chapter 6, Article 27") which allows EU member states to restrict the movement of individuals for public policy and security interests. He stressed that Slovakia is not interested in conflict, and merely wants normal communication consistent with EU standards. Lajcak also expressed fear about the potential activities of extremist groups from both countries converging on Komarno, and said that if the visit takes place, the Government would be obliged to provide a strict security presence.

15. (C) Comment: The Slovaks are clearly and desperately hoping that Solyom cancels his visit before they have to make a very difficult decision (the options are "either bad or worse" Lajcak said). According to EU diplomats at the briefing, the directive under which Slovakia would be denying Solyom entry was meant to stop travel by soccer hooligans and criminals, not for use against heads of state. As with so many Slovak-Hungarian disputes, this one has spiraled quickly out of control (at least in a political sense). Our Romanian colleague - who has seen similar standoffs between his government and Hungary - called it a 50/50 proposition as to whether Solyom goes forward with his trip to Komarno despite Slovakia's warnings. If he does (regardless of whether the Slovaks stop him or allow him to cross the border), the "private" visit will cast an even darker stain than usual on Slovak-Hungarian bilateral relations. End comment.

EDDINS